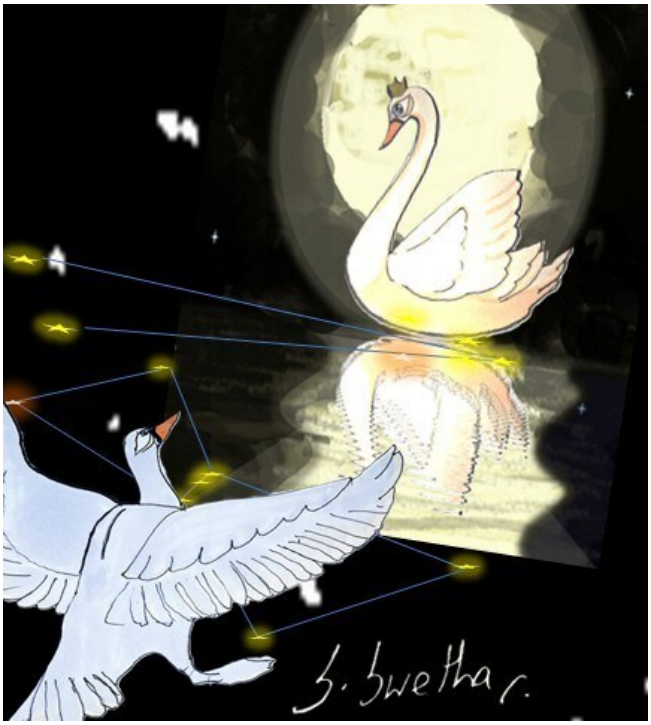
The Swan and the Shadow: A Comparative Analysis of the Swan Lake and Urvashi-Pururavas Myths through the Lens of Lunar Nodal Precession – Swetha Sundaram



Abstract:

This research compares the 'Swan Maiden' motif across cultures, contrasting the Western Swan Lake narrative with the Vedic Urvashi-Pururavas myth. By mapping the periodic separation and reunion of the celestial nymph and the terrestrial king, the author identifies a sophisticated astronomical allegory for the "**Lunar Nodal Precession**". The 18.6-year draconic cycle, governed by the intersection of the lunar and ecliptic planes, provides the structural "rhythm" for these tales of karmic longing and spiritual evolution. The study concludes that the Hamsa (Swan) serves as a biological and celestial metaphor for the soul's navigation through the "shadow" of the nodes (Rahu and Ketu), ultimately proposing that these myths are technical manuals for achieving cognitive equilibrium within the shifting tides of time.

Keywords: Lunar Nodal Cycle, 18.6-year Precession, Urvashi-Pururavas, Swan Lake Mythology, Vedic Archeoastronomy, Hamsa Symbolism.

Introduction: Swan Lake (King Pururavas & Urvasi) – A Poignant Love Story Replete with Solar Symbolism

Humans have worshipped the Sun from time immemorial. The Sun is the giver of life through light and heat. It is hence not surprising that solar symbolism should find its way into literary sources from around the world.

The famous opera Swan Lake is but a parallel of the love story of King Pururavas & Urvasi. Both versions are poignant love stories replete with Solar Symbolism, in which the hero wanders in search of his lost love.

The Swan Lake:

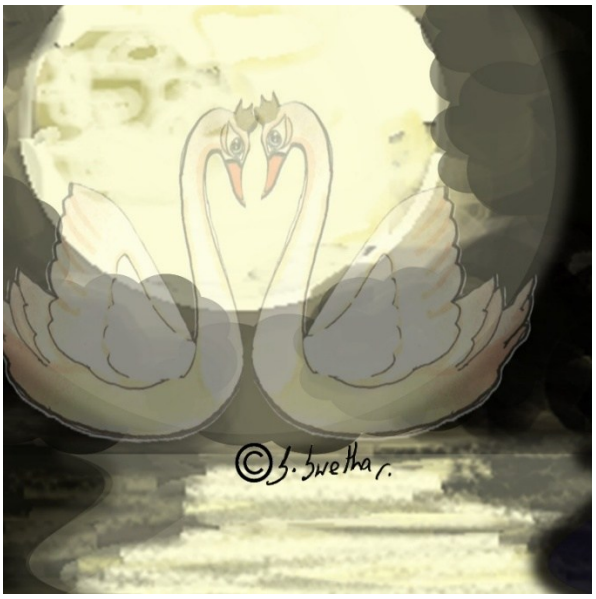
Briefly, The Swan Lake is a tragic love story of Prince Siegfried and Princess Odette. The couple are cursed by the sorcerer Rothbart to be a swan by day and a human by night. The curse of Rothbart could only be broken by true love. Rothbart plays a further trick upon Siegfried by creating a doppelgänger of Odette

called Odile (the Black Swan). Mistaking Odile for Odette, Siegfried pledges his love to Odile, dooming Odette. In the end, Siegfried locates Odette at the lake. The story often ends with the two dying in a lake.

The Story of King Pururavas & Urvasi

In this story, Urvasi agrees to stay with Pururavas as long as he appears before her in his royal robe. Urvasi has two pet goats that are tied to her couch. Seeing that she has been gone from the celestial world for a very long time, the Gandharvas play a trick upon the couple by kidnapping Urvasi's goats. When Urvasi cries for Pururavas's help, he steps up, but without his royal robe, thus breaking his promise to Urvasi. Having lost Urvasi, Pururavas wanders across the battlefield of Kurukshetra until one day, when he locates her in the form of a swan in a lake. At the lake, Urvasi promises to return to him for one night every year.

Swan Lake Symbolism:



The name Odette in Swan Lake means prosperity. Siegfried means victor. Rothbart literally means Red Beard. In Sanskrit, Rakta Bhasa, Rakta means red, and Bhasa means rays. I feel comfortable in associating Rothbart or Red Beard with Red Rays (Rakta Bhasa) of the fiery Sun. Similarly, to me, the name Siegfried seems to be a version of the Sanskrit SvarVid, meaning the finder of light. Odette may be a phonetic cognate of the Sanskrit Vidyota (illuminating) or Vidyotita (the enlightened one), suggesting a shared linguistic root centred on light. Symbolically, wealth is represented by light. Wealth, in the context of this story, is true knowledge. Hence, Odette, the wealthy, is Vidyotita, the enlightened.

If Rothbart is the Sun, then Siegfried-SvarVid has to be the moon. The moon is the one who seeks light (Odette). At night, the moon is fancied to take a human form, where he rules the night sky with his brilliant light. But the light that he has is but a reflection (Odile) of sunlight. Realising his mistake, the moon goes in search of his true love and finds her in the form of a swan swimming in a lake. Commonly, throughout the world, swans are used to represent stars. In this

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context, Odette (the shining light) in the form of a swan is none other than Alderbaran (Alpha Tauri), the Indian Rohini Star. She is the wealth/light sought by the moon as the moon becomes exalted when he meets this star in Taurus. The lake in which she is found is the sunlight. Since the moon sets during the day, metaphorically, the moon (Siegfried-SvarVid) dies with the star Rohini (Odette) in the lake (sunlight).

King Pururavas & Urvasi Symbolism:

Urvasi comes down to earth and stays with King Pururarvas. The legend states that Pururavas was self-effulgent (sva-dṛk, self-enlightened). The Devas created him to kill Dasyus on the battlefield. This symbolically associates Pururavas with the moon and Dasyus with darkness. The moon, the ruler of the night sky, kills darkness with his brilliance. The moon rules winter and gains power in winter. During the winter months, it is imagined that the star Rohini, in the form of Urvasi, descends to be with the moon. The two goats tied to her couch are the twin Ashwins. The Gandharvas are often perceived as the guardians of Vidhya (divine light). At the commencement of summer, they kidnap the twin Ashwins. The Sun becomes exalted when it enters the Ashwini star in the Aries Constellation. When the summer light in the form of the twin Ashwins is stolen, King Pururavas (the moon) loses his royal robe (moonlight). The kidnapping of the twin goats then forces Urvasi to follow them sunward. Having lost Urvasi, Pururavas, the moon searches for his lost love. He wanders across the vast battlefield of Kurukshetra, a metaphor for the celestial sphere and more commonly the Orion Belt. **He, as the seeker, must cross the field to locate her - the light.** The light of knowledge doesn't come automatically to a seeker. The person who needs knowledge/light must seek it. He finds her in the form of a swan swimming in a lake. Again, the water of the lake is the sunlight, and the swan symbolically identifies Urvasi with the star Rohini. The moon becomes exalted when it is conjunct with Rohini in the constellation Taurus. Unlike Odette, Urvasi promises to return to Pururavas for one night in a year. Figuratively, she promises to return to the moon every winter or when the moon enters Taurus.

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Common Lesson:

Both the Swan Lake and the story of King Pururavas & Urvasi poetically show us that just as at daybreak the queen star Rohini, representing all other stars, enters the solar light and is followed by the self-sacrificing moon of the new moon day, to become one with the Sun, so should we strive to identify ourselves with the Supreme Sun via self-sacrifice (saranagathi). Dying in sunlight, i.e., the moon and the stars losing their glow in the sunlight, is akin to us losing our false ego that we are independent when we perform saranagathi.

The moon in these legends is the mortal soul because the moon waxes and wanes. The waxing and waning of the moon represent cycles of births and deaths. By seeking the divine light (Rohini), the moon learns to identify himself with the Supreme Sun by merging into the solar light (lake) in which he finds the divine Rohini (swan).

Urvasi & Pururavas – How the Ancients Used Universal language of love to explain Lunar Nodal Precession!

The love story of Urvashi & Pururavas explains a phenomenon called Lunar Nodal Precession. This is a teeter-totter effect that relates to how high or low the moon appears in our sky. The moon's orbit is tilted at 5.14 ° to the ecliptic plane. The Moon's orbit oscillates across the ecliptic plane, passing above and

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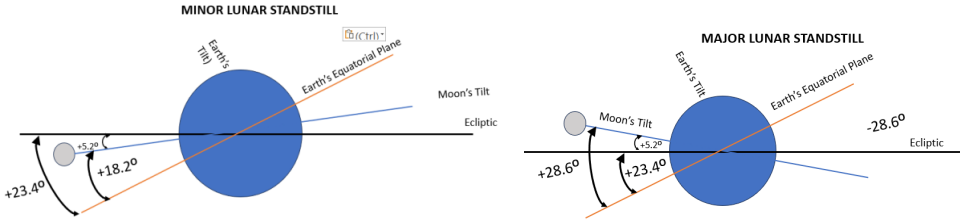
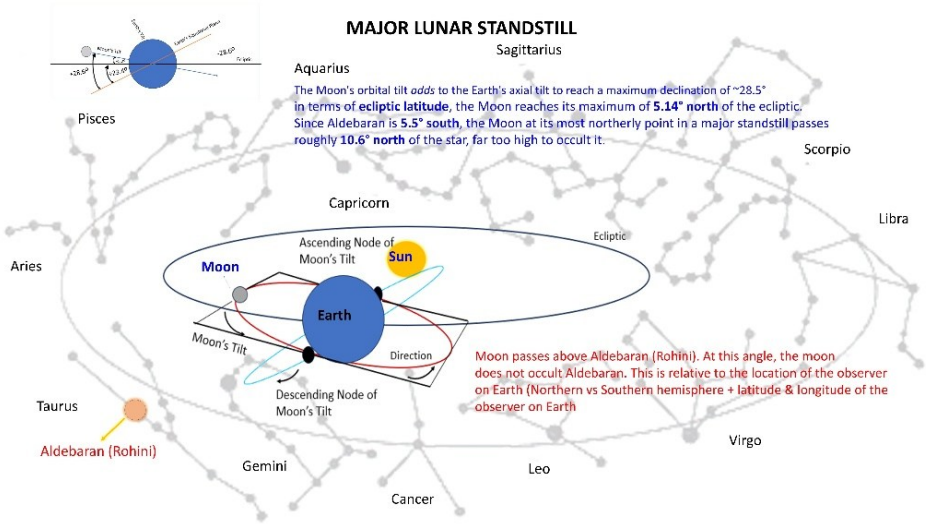
below it in a manner reminiscent of a teeter-totter. This movement of the moon is called lunar nodal precession. It takes 19 years (18.61) to complete one lunar nodal precessional cycle.



The nodal precession of the moon is subdivided into two categories.

a. **Major Lunar Standstill**
b. **Minor Lunar Standstill**

Major Lunar Standstill: The Moon's orbital angle of tilt adds to the Earth's axial tilt to reach a maximum declination of ~28.5° in terms of ecliptic latitude; the Moon reaches its maximum of 5.14° north of the ecliptic.



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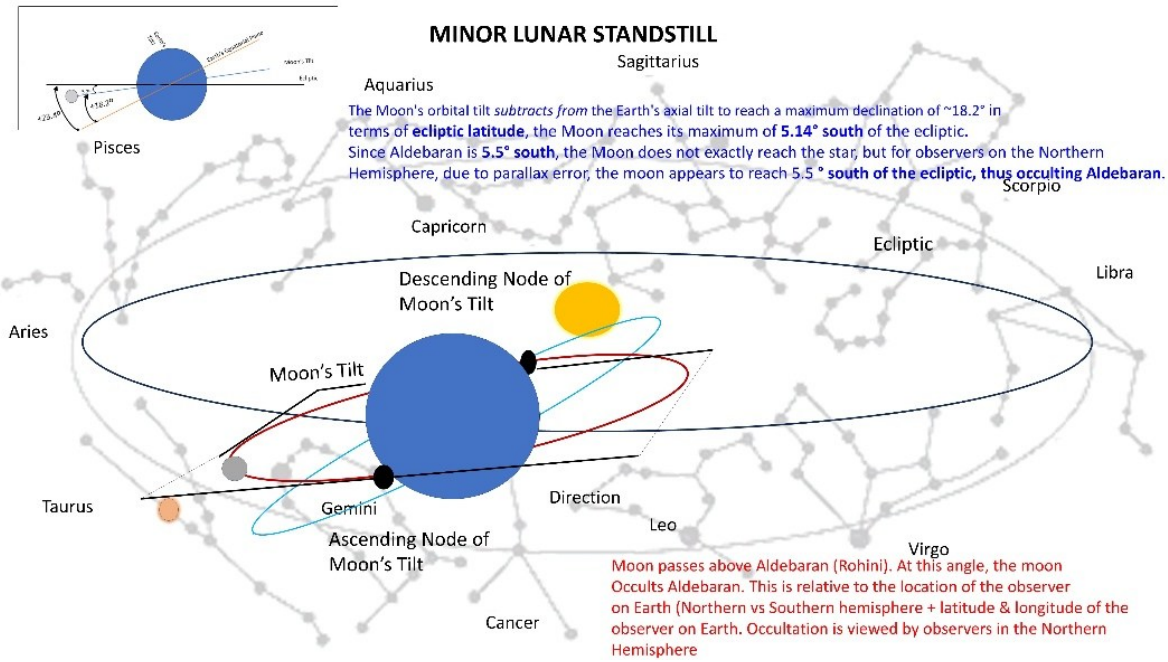
Minor Lunar Standstill:



The Moon's orbital tilt subtracts from the Earth's axial tilt to reach a maximum declination of ~18.2° in terms of ecliptic latitude; the Moon reaches its maximum of 5.14° south of the ecliptic.

Occultation:

An occultation is a phenomenon in astronomy when one celestial body passes in front of another and hides the distant object from an observer's view.

Even though the moon travels across the zodiac, the moon does not exactly pass in front of a star. It either passes above or below a star because of its tilt. For the moon to occult a star, that star must be within 5 °

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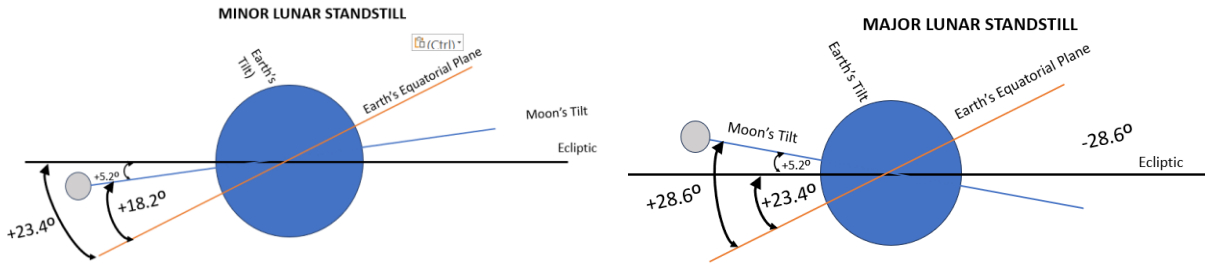
of the ecliptic. Of the 27 stars in the zodiac, only Aldebaran (Rohini) is within this range, as it is approximately 5.5 ° south of the ecliptic.

We compared the moon's tilt moving above or below the ecliptic to a teeter-totter. This is not the ordinary teeter-totter we see in playgrounds, but this celestial teeter-totter is also slowly rotating circularly.

Now, imagine that the ecliptic plane is the floor. The moon on the teeter-totter goes towards the ceiling from the floor, or it can go below towards the floor. The teeter-totter; the moon's orbital plane is going up and down while also rotating. The teeter-totter is never flat along the ecliptic; it is always tilted at an angle of 5.14 °.

Imagine yourself standing in this room on a wedge that is inclined to the floor at an angle of 23.4 °. The slope of the wedge is the celestial equator. This is a unique wedge with half of it above the floor and half below the floor, such that its highest point on the wall is +23.4° and its lowest is -23.4 ° below the floor. The lunar teeter-totter is suspended above the wedge you are standing on in such a way that the fulcrum of the teeter-totter aligns with the centre of the wedge. The spinning teeter-totter's high and low ends do not point at the same wall. They move in a circle while the teeter-totter is going up and down. The lunar spinning teeter-totter takes 18.61 years to complete one rotation.



During a minor lunar standstill, when the teeter-totter board is below the floor of the ecliptic, the moon's ascending node is located near the **autumnal equinox, making it feasible for** the low end of the teeter-totter to point at the star Aldebaran (Rohini). Even though the moon is at 5.14 °, it does not perfectly align with Aldebaran, located at 5.5 ° south of the ecliptic, but because of parallax error, to an observer on Earth, the moon appears to occult Aldebaran.

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Every 18.6 years, when the moon is in a minor lunar standstill, for a period of 3 to 4 years, the moon's ascending node is located near the **autumnal equinox, and** the moon frequently occults Aldebaran (Rohini). During this period, the moon occults Aldebaran once every sidereal month (roughly every 27.3 days) for a period of about 49 consecutive months. This is the reason why Rohini is the favourite wife of the Moon out of the 27 stars, because the Moon does not frequently pass in front of the other 26 stars. Furthermore, Rohini's position, approximately 5.5 degrees south of the ecliptic, places her directly within the Moon's orbital path, making her a primary candidate for lunar occultation. These 3 to 4 years, when the moon frequently passes in front of Aldebaran (Rohini), are the 4 autumns spent by Urvashi with Pururavas. As established, lunar occultations of Aldebaran (Rohini) occur precisely when the Moon's ascending node aligns with the autumnal equinox. This specific orbital configuration corresponds to the period traditionally identified as the 'Four Autumns.' The moment the moon's tilt changes, Rohini no longer appears in front of him.

As it is the moon who is on the spinning teeter-totter, it is he who must travel across the vast celestial field to be with Aldebaran (Rohini) again. It is Pururavas, the moon, who must seek Urvasi (Rohini) in the celestial plane by coming to her plane.

Conclusion:

The moon in these legends is the mortal soul because the moon waxes and wanes. The waxing and waning of the moon represent cycles of births and deaths. By seeking the divine light (Rohini), the moon learns to identify itself with the Supreme Sun by merging into the solar light (lake) in which it finds the divine Rohini (swan).

The moon needs his love (the light). The moon loses a part of himself when the one he loves the most vanishes from him. For what is the moon without moonlight? To regain his truest form, ***he has to go in search of his lost love across a vast, deserted field (cosmic plane-Orion Belt). It is the Moon(soul) as the seeker of light (Siegfried-SvarVid-Pururavas), who must wander across the vast celestial field in search of the divine light (Odette-Urvasi).***

Two legends, one solar code. Once we decode the astronomical observations embedded in these myths, does the 'romantic tragedy' reveal itself as a sophisticated celestial map?

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